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Contact: Amanda Price 517-373-3447

Senate's hard work to craft meaningful water protection measures scheduled to become law today

LANSING – The groundbreaking, comprehensive legislation the Legislature has worked on to protect Michigan's waters is scheduled to be signed into law this afternoon by the governor.

"Michigan's new policies will ensure the Great Lakes will be around for many generations to enjoy," said Sen. Patty Birkholz, chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee. "I'm extremely pleased to see our efforts are paying off. Both sides of the aisle, as well as interested parties from around the state, came together on this package so it would be the best legislation possible to meet the needs of both recreational water users and Michigan's businesses that rely on water.

"The bills being signed today will protect our waters from overuse and withdrawals. But most importantly: this is not the end. We will continue to monitor our waters and keep our commitment to protecting Michigan's finest natural resource."

Senate Bills 850-852, 854 and 857 create new standards for water withdrawals and permit-programs for water users to help avoid adverse impacts on the environment.

The package will:

- Strengthen the current prohibition against water diversion by requiring legislative oversight;
- o Put in place a system to manage significant new water withdrawals that have the potential to impact our water and water-dependent natural resources;
- o Implement an interim standard that will provide protections for key designated trout streams by defining critical zones around the streams;
- O Develop an easy-to-use model to replace the interim standard that will allow a user to click on a map and determine if water use will cause an adverse impact;

- o Establish a permitting program for water bottling operations. This will ensure waters used for this purpose do not impact our water dependent natural resources;
- o Authorize the creation of groups of water users to work with the DEQ in crafting water plans that resolve water use problems before adverse impacts occur; and
- o Require businesses that use our water to propose water use conservation measures.

"Just looking at a sample of what we've accomplished since the Great Lakes Task Force Report was issued a few years ago shows we are serious about this vitally important environmental issue," said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "Everyone involved in this latest package of bills deserves credit for making good policy based on sound science that will stand the test of time. What we've created is a method to preserve one of Michigan's greatest natural resources for residents, job providers and tourists. At the same time we are ensuring that people will be able to enjoy Michigan's waters for many generations to come."

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